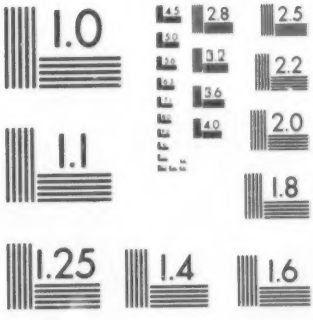

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ABSTRACT

This monograph contends that education in the future can best prepare students to deal with pressing social issues if it works toward three major objectives. These objectives are: (1) to prepare people to live according to a productive work ethic in which work and leisure pursuits are balanced; (2) to instill in students a life ethic in which individual identity is balanced with concern for others; and (3) to imbue students with a service ethic based on the realization that there is obligation beyond self-interest. To accomplish these objectives, educators must first help students break down their preconceptions and attitudes of certainty about what the future will bring. Specific issues with which educators should be concerned within the framework of these objectives include individuality vs. collectivity, routine vs. novelty, global identity vs. local preoccupation, work vs. play, aggression vs. submission, and justice vs. mercy. One way educators can help students stop being concerned with various doomsday concepts and begin creating alternative futures is to help them share in the vision that alternate futures can actually be created. Educators will be successful in these endeavors if they help students assert a common values framework (based on the service ethic, the life ethic, and the work ethic), and if they help students realize that they will be better prepared for the future if they restore balance and moderation to thinking and action. (DB)

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EMERGING CRUCIAL ISSUES FOR SCHOOL AND SOCIETY

by

Dwight W. Allen

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
First Global Conference on the Future
(Toronto, Canada, July 20-25, 1980).

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Emerging Crucial Issues for School and Society

A speech delivered at the
First Global Conference on the Future
Toronto, July 20-25, 1980

Dwight W. Allen

The role of the optimist is very difficult in today's world. Unless we have some sort of catastrophic reorientation, we are not likely to create the kind of social justice that will allow us to have the really optimistic future we would like to be able to predict. Education has the objective of helping people work through the pessimistic reality in their immediate lives to prepare them to fully participate in the kind of society we would like to project. We will never be able to create that kind of society unless we have a coordinated vision of what that life and that society might be.

How do we deal simultaneously with the tyranny of bigness, the concentration of power and things beyond our control, and the tyranny of smallness, in terms of all the little "feudal fiefdoms" people can live in which can compromise human rights and create injustices. Minorities living in the midst of small egocentrically defined majorities is an example of this. We have to recognize that until we can learn to deal effectively with all the extremes, we will never find balance.

Let me identify briefly some of the extremes education in the future must help us prepare for:

1. Individuality vs. collectivity. If we become too collective in orientation, we risk losing our personal identity; if we become too individualized, we lose our perspective for responsibility and service to others.
2. Routine vs. novelty.
3. Global identity vs. local preoccupation, or "tyranny of the common," as some people call it.
4. Order vs. entropy.
5. Preoccupation with the past, preoccupation with the present, or preoccupation with the future. If we become too preoccupied with the future, we forget to live in the present. If we become too idealistic, we create a world that has no reality to it and we do not take steps that would allow that idealism to be interpreted into the real world. If we are too realistic, we lose our vision and our ability to create an ideal future.
6. Work vs. Play.
7. Preoccupation with giving vs. patronization.
8. Aggression vs. submission.
9. Right vs. wrong.
10. Justice vs. mercy.

11. Preoccupation with blessings vs. tribulations.

12. Reward vs. punishment.

We must learn to deal with both extremes in order to attain a balance. In doing so, there is no way to eliminate all risk. Indeed, if there is no risk, we deny our own humanity. I refer to this as my bicycle theory. If you are going to teach someone to ride a bicycle, they must have the right to skin their knees. But if you are a tood teacher, the risk will be reduced in terms of riding out on the street and getting killed! We must avoid singlemindedness and at the same time avoid a preoccupation with alternatives. Choice can become as oppressive as no choice; it can create chaos. Education, as life itself, must prepare us for a sense of balance. When we lose that sense of balance, we are denying effective preparations for the future.

I contend that we will need to create education for three basic purposes. First, we must prepare people for a <u>work</u> ethic--for a productive life. One of the biggest evils of our present society is that our psychological identity has become confused with our vocational identity. I cite as an example a friend of mine in Amherst, Massachusetts. If asked, "What do you do?", his answer would be, "I'm a poet." If you then asked him, "Where is your poetry published?", his answer would be, "It's not." What do you do with a poet who doesn't publish his poetry? Depending

on whether or not he liked you, he might add, "...and I earn my living teaching physics at Amherst College." Noone wants to allow him to be a poet who earns his living teaching physics at Amherst College. People want to imprison our psychological identity within our vocational identity. So, as important as a work ethic is, it is only one part of our lives.

Second, we must prepare for a life ethic--a quality of life, including a real concern for each other. Without this concern, human relationships become very disposable. It is important to retain individual identity, yet at the same time we must maintain interpersonal concerns. I don't think education at the present time serves us very well in terms of helping us find those relationships.

The third ethic is the service ethic. We all have an obligation beyond our own self interests. We have an obligation to link ourselves with the rest of humanity in service to humanity. Unless we do that, we do not succeed. In a conversation with the Director-General of the World Future Studies Federation, I asked why she thought so many people were interested in the future. She said, "It's different in North America and in Europe. In North America, people are interested in the future because they are worried about their personal future. In Europe, they are worried collectively about the future of Europe. They have a crisis

of identity which is a continental crisis, whereas in the United States and Canada, the crisis tends to be more of a personal crisis." I consider this to be a brilliant insight and one that is very important for us to consider.

We need to understand that, if we define it properly, we can study the future as systematically as we can study the past. I think this will be necessary in order to succeed. I have received interesting results in a test I often give in classes and lectures. The test consists of the following four questions. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1) How certain are you about the past?; 2) How certain are you about the present?; 3) How certain are you about the future?; and 4) How long is the present? In a typical class of 30 people, I almost always get a full range of answers on the 1-10 continuum about how certain people are about the past, the present, and the future. People are amazed to find that other people have such different views than they do about how certain the past, present and future are. Many people think of the present as instantaneous, while other people see the present as a longer space of time. But those who say the present is an instant might also say they feel 8, 9 or 10 certain about the present. If the present is an instant, it is impossible to learn about it before it's gone! By the same token, while someone may be 10 certain about the past, how certain can he really be

that he didn't develop cancer yesterday? How can any of us be certain about the past, present, or future? Again, there are no right or wrong answers, but I see inconsistencies. We seem to have all these water-tight compartments in our minds and we never require any consistency between the compartments. I maintain that education for the future has to help people break down these watertight compartments about certainty.

We have the ability to create alternative futures and part of what education is all about is to help people share in the vision that those alternative futures can be created. It would be sad to think the future was so unpredictable that our decisions and actions today wouldn't make a significant difference in terms of tomorrow's future. Yet many people are so preoccupied with the doomsday concept that they don't feel the future makes any difference. We need to help people gain these perspectives. We need to understand that basically we are living in a world where values are coming more and more to the foreground. A significant statement from the Club of Rome Conference on Learning in Salzburg in 1979 was that, "Everyone in the world agrees that stealing is wrong, but no one can agree as to what stealing is." Until we can find a way to assert a common values framework, with room for individual identification of values as well as a collective identification

of values, we will not succeed. The crisis of education, then, is to find a way to restore balance and moderation to our thinking as well as to our actions.